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Committee on Conferences
Substantive session

Draft report

Addendum

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I. Calendar of conferences and meetings

C. Improved utilization of conference-servicing resources

1. Meeting statistics of United Nations organs: consultations with bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them

Introduction and overview

1. Since 1983, the Committee on Conferences has studied a series of reports containing the meeting statistics and, in more recent years, the documentation statistics of a core sample of United Nations organs in New York, Geneva and Vienna. Statistics on bodies meeting in Nairobi have been included since 1998.

2. At its 418th meeting, on 30 August 1999, the Committee reviewed the report of the Secretary-General on meeting statistics of United Nations organs that had met in 1998 (A/AC.172/1999/3).

3. Moreover, in paragraph 23 of its resolution 53/208 A of 18 December 1998, the General Assembly reiterated its request to the Committee on Conferences to consult with those bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated conference resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources. Furthermore, in paragraph 24 of the same resolution, the Assembly requested that the Chairperson of the Committee transmit a letter to the chairpersons of all bodies that had utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure (80 per cent) of their allocated conference resources in the previous year, informing them of the problem and drawing their attention to the significant loss of meeting time, with a view to encouraging appropriate action on their part so as to improve the utilization of conference resources.

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4. At the same meeting, the Committee considered an oral report made by the Chairperson on the actions taken pursuant to the requests set out in paragraph 3 above.

Discussion

5. The view was expressed that the utilization factor for a number of subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council and for the Economic and Social Council itself was very low, and the hope was expressed that the utilization factor could be improved in the future.

6. It was requested that in reports on this agenda item to be presented to the Committee on Conferences in the future, the organs be listed in the order of their utilization factors. It was also requested that utilization factors for a three-year period be provided in the report so that trends in the utilization factors of various bodies could be easily identified.

7. The view was also expressed that the incorporation of the statistics for Nairobi in all the analytical tables for future reports, when data for the three-year period was available, would be welcome.

8. The Committee expressed the view that the utilization factor and the benchmark figure of 80 per cent was a goal to be achieved by each duty station separately, which should also be reflected in the report.

9. The view was expressed that consultations between the Chairperson of the Committee on Conferences and the chairpersons of bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions should continue as person-to-person contacts, with a view to yielding better results than a formal letter would.

Conclusions and recommendations

10. The Committee on Conferences took note with appreciation that the overall utilization factor for 1998 exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent and that the utilization factors at Geneva and Vienna were 87 per cent and 88 per cent respectively, the same as last year. However, the Committee noted with concern that the utilization factor for New York represented a one percentage point drop, to 77 per cent, falling short of the benchmark.

11. The Committee looked forward to the inclusion of the statistics for Nairobi in the analytical tables.

12. The Committee expressed concern that in 1998 only 56 per cent of the bodies in the sample utilized 80 per cent or more of their available conference-servicing resources.

13. The Committee took note of the oral report by the Chairperson on consultations with bodies concerning utilization of the conference services available to them and requested the Chairperson to continue to consult on its behalf with the chairpersons of bodies that had consistently utilized less than the applicable benchmark figure of their allocated resources for the past three sessions, with a view to making appropriate recommendations in order to achieve the optimum utilization of conference-servicing resources.

2. Provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States

Introduction and overview

14. In its resolutions 50/206 A of 23 December 1995 and 51/211 A of 18 December 1996, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to provide, within the resources

approved for conference services for the bienniums 1996–1997 and 1998–1999 respectively, interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, taking into account the priority due to meetings included in the calendar of conferences and meetings.

15. Moreover, in section A, paragraph 9, of resolution 52/214 of 22 December 1997, the General Assembly decided to include all necessary resources in the budget for the biennium 1998–1999 to provide interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States upon request by those groupings, on an ad hoc basis, in accordance with established practice. Subsequently, in paragraph 28 of resolution 53/208 A, the Assembly reiterated its decision for the biennium 2000–2001, and requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-fourth session, through the Committee on Conferences, a report on the implementation of that decision.

16. Pursuant to the above request, the Committee considered the report by the Secretary-General contained in document A/54/208 at its 418th meeting, on 30 August 1999.

Discussion

17. The Committee congratulated and thanked the members of the Secretariat for the fact that 83 per cent of the requests for interpretation services for meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States had been met, and also supported the technique of over-programming in order to meet those requests.

18. Support was expressed for the conclusion contained in paragraph 13 of the report, but the view was expressed that it was difficult to plan work programmes in advance as there was a certain degree of improvisation to be taken into account in view of the evolution of the debate in various intergovernmental bodies. The importance of meetings of regional groups in the functioning of the intergovernmental bodies was emphasized.

Conclusions and recommendations

19. The Committee on Conferences took note of the report on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States.

20. In view of the importance of meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States for the smooth functioning of sessional bodies, and in view of the significant increase in the requests for such meetings, the Committee welcomed the fact that 83 per cent of the requests for interpretation services had been met while 100 per cent of the requests for facilities only had been met.

21. While recognizing that meetings of Charter and mandated bodies must be serviced as a priority, the Committee regretted that 17 per cent of the requests for interpretation services made by regional and other major groupings of Member States had not been met.

22. The Committee again urged intergovernmental bodies to spare no effort at the planning stage to take into account meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States, to make provision for such meetings in their programmes of work and to notify Conference Services well in advance of any cancellations so that unutilized conference-servicing resources may, to the extent possible, be reassigned to meetings of regional and other major groupings of States.

23. The Committee requested the Secretariat to include in future reports a breakdown on the item of the requests by regional groups.